GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2715
ANSWERED ON:05.12.2007
ASEAN CONFERENCE
Singh Shri Mohan

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether an Indian delegation led by the Prime Minister has participated in the ASEAN Conference held in Singapore recently;

(b) if so, the details of the issues discussed therein and agreements signed by India with various countries during the said Conference;

(c) whether India urged all the ASEAN member countries to adopt parliamentary democratic systems; and

(d) if so, the reaction of the member countries there?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE)

(a) Yes, Hon'ble PM attended the 6th India-ASEAN Summit held in Singapore on 21st November 2007.

(b) Hon'ble PM discussed measures with ASEAN leaders to further strengthen and deepen multi-faceted ties India has with ASEAN countries. The Statement made by Hon'ble PM at the Summit is enclosed. No agreement was signed by India at the Summit.

(c) No.

(d) Does not arise.

ENCLOSURE REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PART (B) OF LOK SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2715 REGARDING 'ASEAN CONFERENCE' FOR ANSWER ON 05/12/2007

Statement by Prime Minister at the 6th India−ASEAN Summit

21/11/2007

Your Excellency Prime Minister Lee,
Your Majesty,
Excellencies,

I thank you for your warm welcome, the friendly atmosphere and your generous hospitality. I am very happy to be here in Singapore, a country that epitomizes the qualities of courage, strength and excellence.

It is always a pleasure to be among friends. India is privileged to be part of a process that is contributing to ever widening circles of prosperity. Our relationship with the ASEAN countries is the pillar of our "Look East" policy. Ever since we became Sectoral Dialogue partners of ASEAN 15 years ago, we have taken substantial strides in integrating our economies, societies and institutions. We are determined to take this process forward because we are convinced that it is a win-win formula for both of us.

India is now on a new growth trajectory, where sustained economic growth of 9 − 10% per year seem possible. Our expanding market, human resources and strengths in S&T and the knowledge economy are what we contribute to the process of economic integration.

Since our last Summit, we have made concrete progress.

The most striking achievement of our engagement so far is that the target of bilateral trade of 30 billion US dollars that we had set for ourselves for the year 2007 has already been achieved.

Exports of ASEAN member countries to India have grown at a phenomenal rate of over 65% last year. This shows that India is a willing partner in the integration of our economies, and is committed to free trade. Our officials have been engaged in active negotiations to conclude the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement. I have no doubt that we all share a common political will to reach an agreement at the earliest. I want to assure you that on its part India has shown, and will continue to show, the necessary flexibility and determination to achieve this objective. We will work together with you to conclude the negotiations, as agreed, by March next

year.

We have achieved progress in the key area of connectivity. Today, there are over 215 direct and indirect flights every week between India and Singapore, 115 flights with Thailand and 50 with Malaysia. But we seek much more from our Open Skies Policy with ASEAN. We are also keen to join the Open Skies regime amongst the ASEAN countries, when it is finalized.

I would like to commend our hosts for organising the exhibition "On the Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China and Southeast Asia" and a conference on the subject "Early Indian Influences in Southeast Asia". We would welcome proposals that revive interest in our ancient civilisational links and common heritage.

In Cebu, I had proposed the early operationalisation of the India-ASEAN Science and Technology Fund. I am happy to announce that we have created this Fund with an initial corpus fund of 1 million US dollars. This Fund should be used to encourage collaborative R&D and technology development so that we can harness knowledge for the creation of wealth.

Our exchange programmes for students and diplomats from ASEAN have received enthusiastic responses. I am happy to announce that we will make the training courses for ASEAN diplomats a yearly feature. I would further suggest that we organize seminars for such trainees with their peer groups from India in ASEAN capitals.

This year we have concluded Memorandums of Understanding for the establishment of Centres for English Language Training in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Together with Entrepreneurship Development Centres in these countries, this initiative will contribute to capacity building and empowerment of youth in these countries.

As we look ahead, we need to closely monitor the implementation of the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity. I seek your support.

Given the results so far, I propose that we set a bilateral trade target of 50 billion US dollars by the year 2010.

To facilitate this, we should agree on a process to simplify the visa regime for businessmen to travel from India to ASEAN and vice-versa. I propose that our authorities in consultation with industry representatives formulate simple criteria for issue of visas to bona fide businessmen the same day.

India-ASEAN cooperation in the important area of health has focused on the challenge posed by avian influenza. India will be hosting an International Conference on the subject in December. I propose that the India-ASEAN Working Group dealing with health be directed to prepare a "India-ASEAN Health Care Initiative". The focus will be on providing basic drugs at low cost to our public health systems through steps such as joint production of medical formulations. A second focus could be to develop a framework for cooperation in traditional medicine systems, which are popular in all our countries.

Climate change has emerged as a major challenge, especially for developing countries. We can gain from a knowledge partnership in this area. Our individual approaches to this global issue must be based on strong scientific foundations and on our respective local experiences and needs. In India we are already in the process of identifying a centre of excellence for climate change. I would propose the setting up of an India − ASEAN Network on Climate Change that would pool and share expertise, exchange best practices and submit recommendations for common positions taking into account national priorities.

To give a boost to this cooperation, I propose to set up an India-ASEAN Green Fund with an initial contribution of US$ 5 million for pilot projects to promote adaptation and mitigation technologies. Once the Fund is established I invite other countries to make contributions as well.

In the final analysis, if the India-ASEAN process is to take root, it must become a peoples movement. Encouraged by our success with exchange programmes for students and diplomats, I propose that we have a Special Programme for Regular Exchanges among our Parliamentarians.

I am happy that our tourists are increasingly looking eastward and more than 2 million tourists from India are expected to travel to ASEAN holiday destinations this year. The number of tourist arrivals from ASEAN countries to India has gone up to 280,000 but it is evident that there is huge scope for expansion. I would therefore propose that we agree to work towards a target of one million tourist arrivals from ASEAN to India by the year 2010.

On earlier occasions, I have shared with you India's vision of an Asian economic community consisting of an integrated market and linked by efficient road, rail, air and shipping services. The creation of this "arc of advantage" will be possible if we can successfully create a robust institutional architecture for regional cooperation and action. The elements I have outlined earlier are the building blocks of this architecture.

I am extremely optimistic about the future of our partnership. The multi-sectoral approach towards our cooperation is the right one. I want to assure you that you will find an enthusiastic partner in India.

India has a stake in ASEAN's stability and prosperity just as we believe ASEAN has a stake in the transformation that India is experiencing.

Thank you.